

Mandatory online training about child sexual abuse and other forms of abuse for adults working with children

We recommend that the introduction of mandatory online training about child sexual abuse, together with other forms of abuse and violation as an additional requirement in the application process for all adults seeking a WWCC.

We recommend that this mandatory online training is also included within Victorian Institute of Teaching registration assessments, which are aligned with but separate to the WWCC process.

Why is this needed?

Introduced in 2000, the Working with Children Check (WWCC) is legislated by each state and territory for the purpose of conducting background checks for people seeking to engage in child-related work. The check aims to prevent people from working with children if records indicate that they may pose an unacceptable risk to children. Assessment of a person's eligibility to work with children and involves a check of a person's criminal history and other disciplinary and police information. The process of application is administrative, with no additional requirements on WWCC holders to undertake any training in the area of child abuse or child protection.

The current WWCC systems represents a further opportunity to improve the competence and competence of adults in the community who have involvement with children.

It is a sad irony that mandatory training is a requirement for those who want work in hospitality and hold a Responsible Service of Alcohol Certificate, and yet there is no mandatory training required to hold a Working with Children Check in any jurisdiction.

The mandatory training involved with the Responsible Serving of Alcohol includes developing the confidence and competence of staff to assess the levels of intoxication of patrons and how to engage them in conversations about limiting their further alcohol intake or refusal to serve further drinks to them. The intent of the training is to ensure the safety of patrons and compliance with licensing regulations.

Adding mandatory training to the pre-existing platform of a Working with Child Check is a small step to take with the potential to add yet another, far reaching mechanism into the strategies to

improve efforts to prevent child sexual abuse and better respond to the needs of children who experience it. It is cost effective with the potential to impact the safety of children at scale across diverse geographic and demographic communities.

Our children are worth the investment.

What would the education need to include?

The insights of survivors in our report *Hear us now, Act now*, alongside views on child sexual abuse held by the adult community (Tucci and Mitchell, 2022) outline the importance of training to build confidence and competence in adults to be better able to protect and support children. This training should include:

The scale of the issue of child sexual abuse: It should highlight the responsibility of all adults, especially those working with children, to be alert to potential abuse and active in their response to it. It needs to highlight the high prevalence rates of child abuse in Australia. In so doing, it will take abuse from behind closed doors and into the public sphere.

The tactics of perpetrators: It must combat stereotypes of what perpetrators of child sexual abuse look like in addition to teaching adults how to identify the critical signs that an individual is behaving in a way that is dangerous, grooming or abusing a child. This education must also consider the complexities associated with children being abused by those who are close to them, and who are trusted by their community, and how this is likely to be a significant barrier to disclosure. It needs to enable adults to understand the signs that an adult may be acting inappropriately or abusively towards children. It should include information about the ways that children and young people are manipulated into contexts in which the abuse occurs, becomes normalised and then held secret.

Promoting children's rights and voice: It is fundamental that adults learn how to support a child's autonomy, so that their understanding of their rights are strong, even when a person with significant power attempts to deny or restrict these rights. It needs to support adults to know how to create safe spaces and supportive relationships in which children feel able to speak openly and honestly, even against another adult or young person in the environment.

Recognise indicators in children: It must include information to support adults to develop a strong understanding of the warning signs that children experiencing abuse may display, including verbal and non-verbal cues. Adults need to have an understanding that 'challenging' behaviours by children are a form of communication, rather than reasons to punish and manage without consideration.

Talking to children about concerns: Adults working with or supporting children must understand how to create safe spaces for children to share anything they like. Adults need skills in how to ask questions and direct conversation about any concerns they may be observing in a way that is experienced as supportive and effective and opens up the possibility to for children to talk about what may be happening to them.

Responding to Disclosures: Adults need the knowledge and skills to respond to a disclosure safely and effectively. Many adults lack the confidence to take action if a child discloses to them. Critically, disclosures must not only be acted on in order to protect children, but they

must also be handled with extreme care, respect and compassion. This training should increase adult knowledge of how to respond to disclosures of manipulation and abuse in a way that makes children feel believed, not at fault, and validated for communicating about their discomfort and distress.